



Unit .30

Session .04

Holding Fast to the Gospel of Jesus

Scripture



2 Corinthians 11:1-15

1 I wish you would put up with a little foolishness from me. Yes, do put up with me! **2** For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, because I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ. **3** But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be seduced from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. **4** For if a person comes and preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you had not received, or a different gospel, which you had not accepted, you put up with it splendidly! **5** Now I consider myself in no way inferior to those “super-apostles.” **6** Even if I am untrained in public speaking, I am certainly not untrained in knowledge. Indeed, we have in every way made that clear to you in everything. **7** Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? **8** I robbed other churches

by taking pay from them to minister to you. **9** When I was present with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, since the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my needs. I have kept myself, and will keep myself, from burdening you in any way. **10** As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. **11** Why? Because I don’t love you? God knows I do! **12** But I will continue to do what I am doing, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want to be regarded as our equals in what they boast about. **13** For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. **14** And no wonder! For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. **15** So it is no great surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will be according to their works.

Intro Options

Main Point:
We must know the true gospel so clearly that we're never tempted to believe a false gospel.

Option 1

Counterfeit money or pieces of art often look nothing like the real thing, but we would be hard-pressed to tell the difference between the real and the fake. Bring a counterfeit item and put it side-by-side with the real counterpart on a table. Items could include name brand clothing or shoes, art, or food (think Oreos® and off brand chocolate sandwich cookies from the dollar section). Allow students to examine the items and notes about the differences.

▪ How do we know a counterfeit from the real thing?

Discuss with your students about how counterfeits are designed to look real and confuse people, but you can tell what is fake if you have spent enough time with the real thing. In today's lesson we'll see how important it is to know the real gospel so we will not be confused by any false gospels.

Option 2

Your students are going to make “When to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em” guides. If your students don't know those terms, they can make, “When to hold on and when to let go” guides.

These guides can take just about any form; they can be “commercials” (skits); they can be diagrams or flow-charts (think “If X, then Y; if not X, then Z” kind of flow-charts); they can be a poster giving a list of “when to hold ‘em’ pointers and when to fold ‘em” pointers. For an added element, you could have half your kids make guides specifically for Christians and the other half make general guides for all people, Christian and non-Christian. The students should try to make guidelines that will be helpful for anything from figuring out what they keep and what to throw out during spring cleaning to whether or not to continue a relationship. The more encompassing the guidelines, the better.

Let students prepare their guides, then share them. Are there more things worth holding onto, or more things worth letting go? Are there differences between what Christians hold onto and what non-Christians hold onto? Explain that in today's lesson, we'll see one thing Paul tells us always to hold onto: the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, even at the cost of confronting false gospels.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-4.



Swimming with sharks, disturbing beehives, poking sleeping bears, hunting crocodiles bare-handed. Most people would call these foolish choices. The danger far outweighs any potential benefits. But this doesn't stop people from taking selfies with tigers and engaging in all kinds of other risky behaviors.

▪ When have you been tempted to engage in risky behavior?

We are usually about to recognize foolishness, but because of our sin, it can sometimes seem like a good idea. To unbelievers, the message of the cross sounds like foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18). But if believers aren't careful, they too can doubt or dismiss what is central to the faith. The world is full of temptations and distractions to keep people from a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and sometimes these distractions enter the church by Satan's desire to lead even believers astray.

The apostle Paul and the Corinthians had a loving relationship, similar to parent/child relationships at times. He offered correction based out of his deep love for the believers. Paul loved the church, but they were sinning. He was instrumental in starting the church at Corinth and he saw himself as a spiritual father. His goal was to “give the bride away” to her betrothed husband—Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to do all he could to help ensure that the bride of the church in Corinth was pure for her groom, Christ Jesus. 

- In Faith: To be saved, a person must believe the gospel, including sharing with Jesus in His death and resurrection (1 Cor. 15).
- In Fellowship: Paul was concerned for the unity of the church—they had dealt with issues of division (1 Cor. 1:10-17), immoral church members (1 Cor. 5), lawsuits (1 Cor. 6), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14), and false teachers (2 Cor. 11-12). All of these issues were dividing the one bride of Christ which should be unified

Within the church, some believers had accepted teachers of a different gospel—one that could not save. By listening to these teachers, the Corinthians rejected Paul and his message. But Paul was jealous on God's behalf for these fellow believers, and he chose to fight for them to know truth. God has given us one gospel—Jesus alone is the way to the Father (John 14:6). Every other gospel is no gospel at all, and is instead Satan's deception that leads to destruction.

▪ What are some “other gospels” people proclaim?

▪ Why are people tempted to believe in false gospels?

COMMENTARY

2 Corinthians

Main Point:
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“This is the first of two mentions of Eve in the New Testament, and it is utterly intentional. Eve was completely deceived by Satan’s cunning (cf. 1 Timothy 2:14). When Eve fell, it was not because she was beaten into submission by Satan, but by his encircling her soul with sequential coils of deception as he promised Eve things he could not deliver. So it was with the betrothed Corinthian community as they were susceptible to Satan’s cunning as he led them away from Christ into the promise of a more triumphant, victorious, prosperous Christianity — a Christianity that was dismissive of taking up the cross and weakness and suffering. Indeed, Satan was so cunning that he had convinced many of the Corinthians that it was Paul who was the cunning one (cf. 12:16). The wolves in the church that devour sheep do not howl and bare their teeth. They come in sheep’s clothing, smiling, reciting Scripture, full of understanding, promising something more than Christ. Paul feared that through satanic deception the Corinthians would fall to three delusions: ‘another Jesus,’ ‘a different spirit,’ and ‘a different gospel.’”¹



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

Bride of Christ

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Jesus redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ’s relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

TEACHING PLAN

Read 2 Corinthians 11:5-11.



The Corinthians expected two things from their teachers. First, they wanted their teachers to be eloquent, trained public speakers, like Paul's opponents, the "super-apostles," were. Paul could hold his own in a public forum (Acts 17:19-34), but he was not a professional speaker. Of course, this did not stop Paul from his mission. While Paul may have lacked training, he was thoroughly equipped with the knowledge of the gospel, which he heard firsthand from Jesus Himself (Gal. 1:11-12). When Paul arrived in Corinth, he made it a point not to wow the Corinthians with human speech or wisdom. Instead, his goal was to proclaim the gospel clearly and simply so that the Spirit would demonstrate the power to save (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

- **How do people in our culture often value the delivery of a message more than its content?**

The Corinthians' second expectation was that their teachers make their living through teaching. A good teacher, after all, was worthy of being supported by his students. Paul worked to support himself because he did not want to burden the people he ministered to. He preached the gospel of Jesus for free, and trusted the Lord to provide for his needs. The enemies boasted in their teaching, but Paul boasted in his sacrifice. In this he reflected the Lord Jesus, who set aside His privileges as the Son of God and came to earth to die for our sins (2 Cor. 8:9).

Read 2 Corinthians 11:12-15.



To this point, Paul had been sarcastic in his comments about the "super-apostles." But here, Paul got to the point—these "super-apostles" were doing the work of Satan! They fit the Corinthians' mold, but they were liars, just like their master, Satan. The church must examine her leaders—skills have their place, but commitment to the gospel is of highest importance. False prophets who claim to speak for God are wolves in sheep's clothing who want nothing more than to feast upon their prey.

- **What are some ways we can recognize false teachers in the church?**
- **Why must believers confront those who would preach false messages in the church?**

Jesus' disciples recognized that Jesus alone had the words of life (John 6:68). His gospel message was committed to the disciples that, by the power of the Spirit, they would take it to the ends of the earth. Paul too had received this commission, and he preached the gospel everywhere he went. The truth of Jesus crucified and raised for the salvation of sinners is the message of eternal life. Every other "gospel" is a sentence of eternal destruction. Paul chose to boast in his weaknesses because this is where the power of Christ shines through the clearest (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul held fast to the gospel—it is the only way to salvation. We must hold fast to the gospel for the same reason.



COMMENTARY

2 Corinthians

Main Point:
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"Traveling speakers and professional philosophers in Paul's day were accorded status by the fees they charged. In fact, a cheap fee was thought to imply that the message wasn't important. Therefore Paul's refusal to accept money for his ministry in Corinth was negatively interpreted to mean either 1) an admission that his teaching was of low caliber, 2) that his message wasn't worth much, 3) that he gave the gospel away because nobody would pay for it, or 4) that he was not really an apostle. Add to this the fact that the 'superapostles' charged for their renditions of the gospel and you have the picture. ... Paul explains, 'And no wonder, for even Satan dis-guises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness' (vv. 14, 15a). This is the only time that Satan is described as 'an angel of light,' though the idea is certainly in the Old Testament (cf. Isaiah 14:12-15). The point is that he is the arch-deceiver. Jesus said of him, 'When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44). When Satan is at work we never smell sulfur or glance down at a cloven hoof; rather he is sweetness and a congenial, smiling light — until he has control."²

Activity

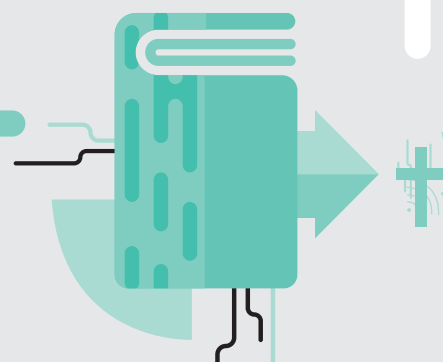
Split your students into two groups. Each group should come up with a list of five ways or situations in which we are tempted to compromise or alter the gospel. For example, we might be tempted to say that Jesus is just one way of many to be saved, or we might be tempted to tell people as long as they trust Jesus in their heart they don't need to obey him as Lord.

Once each group has made their list, come back together. Each group should share one way we are tempted to alter the gospel. Now, each group should figure out how they would confront the false gospel or the alteration the other group shared and hold fast to the true gospel. Give them a few moments to come up with some ideas and then let them share. Discuss whether that confrontation style is good and/or how to improve it. Does the group who originally presented the alteration have a better idea for God-relying confrontation?

Once both groups have gone through the first alteration/confrontation in their lists, let them offer the second, and each group should suggest how to confront that change while holding fast to the true gospel. Continue until you have gone through all five alterations, or until your time is up.

(p. 105, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus proclaimed that He alone is the way a person can be saved and come to the Father. This exclusive claim is at the heart of the gospel. As followers of Christ, we are to hold fast to the one true gospel of Jesus and proclaim it to the world as we also confront the false gospels preached by others.





HOLDING FAST TO THE GOSPEL

We must know the true gospel so clearly that we're never tempted to believe a false gospel.

JESUS CONNECTION



The gospel is an exclusive claim: Jesus alone is the way a person can be saved and come to the Father. As followers of Christ, we are to hold fast to the one true gospel of Jesus, proclaim it to the world and confront the false gospels preached by others.



LIFEWISE QUALITY

DISCERNMENT – Being able to recognize what is true and false and right and wrong.



HEAD

What was Paul afraid might happen to the disciples at the Corinthian church?

How does Paul describe false apostles?



HEART

Paul knew his friends were being tricked by a message that promised good things but would lead to foolish choices and negative consequences. In our lives, people we know can sometimes be blinded to the lies they are believing. When and how is it most helpful to encourage them to discern truth from lies?

How do you feel most tempted to compromise on the truth of God's Word? (E.g., believing that only part of the Bible is true, Jesus is not equal with God the Father, trusting your thoughts or feelings more than the Bible, etc.) How does it encourage you to know that Jesus and His disciples were willing to suffer and die for the truth of the gospel?



HANDS

There are literally thousands of messages competing for your attention every minute of every day: from people, social media, online articles and videos, and more. Which of these three options indicates a discerning approach? What isn't discerning about the other two? Write out your answers and then ask a trusted adult about the three options and how to be more discerning.

1. Believing everything you hear and see
2. Only believing what you already agree with
3. Asking questions or checking out what you read to see if it is true